

Almost the only time we saw one another was around the first of the month when we would gather to ask June to wait a little for the rent. Again. And she would give us all Frescas and tell stories about booze in her douche bag and an AA lover who was such a man that when he made love, her naturally curly hair rolled straight out like a New Year's favor.

Usually we lived inside ourselves like blood but as June talked and smoked and made us laugh, life unfolded like a map and we made plans to get together for dinner and throw lavish parties.

Then Chi moved out taking Maria and her heavy duty cleansers and a stereo moved in next door and started beer fights in the hall with a collection of neckties who had a Whirl-O-Touch album organizer.

Then June's boyfriend turned out to be a married stiff and she met a man from Chicago, sold the house just like that and flew East forever.

People turned themselves over like new leaves and I moved from apt. to apt., a nomad on a chain, looking for a little less noise, wearing the place like a rabbit's foot.

For years now I have been the only original tenant, living alone in the garage apartment, as unapproachable as Billy Goat Gruff, constantly offended by the mileage lore of Volkswagons and the sight of Frisbees against the evening sky.

So I move on to God knows where saying goodbye only to June to whom my fancy, no longer young, turns at all seasons.

-- Ronald Koertge

Pasadena CA

WHEN THE RED DOG CAME

he laid his head in my mother's lap
& their hair was just the same
& I felt afraid.

"I am the Red Knight & you
are the Red Knight's lady."
"I know."

All day my father & I see them
only as red streaks across yellow
water, yellow fields.

All night the dog whinnies, dreaming
he's a red horse. He carries her
into the wind. Her red hair flies behind.

When my father gets home late
the dog lies across the bedroom door
& barks "Squat toad! Squat toad!"

In the room my mother sleeps
a cool blue sleep. Next morning
she cries & stamps her feet

because she can't find
a way to break the spell.
If she ever does, I know

he'll ride away with my mother
clinging to his shoulders
heavy & soft as a prince's robe.

THE DANCING QUEEN

who was no longer the fairest in the land
knew that a pair of iron shoes
with high heels and strong ankle straps
had been made especially for her
on the plaster cast of her long & narrow foot
which was kept on file with the royal shoemaker.
And though she knew they had been held
over the scullery fire with iron tongs
till their black soles & heels & vamps
glittered white as Cinderella-glass,
she buckled them on swiftly, deftly, unbidden
& unassisted, when the man in the black hood,
apology glinting out of the eyeslits,
bowed low & placed them before her jeweled hem.
Though her lovely face was very white
& her much-kissed lips unaccustomedly taut,
she walked back & forth, back & forth,
holding her skirts above her seared ankles,
showing the shoes to her famous mirror.
"What do you think?" she asked it, preening.
"They suit you perfectly," the mirror said.
"Fine," said the queen, "I'll take them
And I'll wear them to my daughter's wedding,
& there, while the prince her husband waits
to cup her hard young apples in his hands,
I shall dance until I drop down dead."